DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 343 962 UD 028 078

AUTHOR Mahoney, Margaret E.
TITLE Mentors. The President's Report.
INSTITUTION Commonwealth Fund, New York, N.Y.
PUB DATE 83
NOTE 17p.; Reprinted from the 1983 Annual Report of the Commonwealth Fund.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Aspiration; Black Students; *Disadvantaged Youth; *Employment Programs; High Schools; *High School Students; Individual Development; Interpersonal Relationship; *Mentors; Part Time Employment; Student Educational Objectives; *Summer Programs; Urban Problems; *Urban Youth; Youth Employment; Youth Programs
IDENTIFIERS *New York (New York)

ABSTRACT

This report describes the role of a mentor of young people and a summer program providing mentors for high school students. For two summers, with the help of the Commonwealth Fund, several hundred young New Yorkers were chosen from among high school juniors with little hope of finding a summer job to enroll in a program sponsored by Hunter College (New York City) and the New York Coalition of 100 Black Women. The program combines a supervised summer job with a mentor who takes responsibility for guiding one youngster through the work period and encouraging a future course of education toward new individual goals. The program illustrates mentoring, not as a panacea for social ills, but as a human relationship encouraging and guiding personal growth and development. A mentor differs from a role model in that a role model, good or bad, says "be like me," while the mentor represents a commitment to values and behavior engendering a strong sense of personal worth and encouraging self-realization. A strategy for successful mentoring begins with selecting and developing mentors, and matching them with youngsters carefully. The responsibility for creating a mentor system falls on leadership in the community where the young people live. The young person joined with a mentor may realize a new horizon combining realism with new hope. (SLD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

THE PRESIDENT'S REPORT

MENTORS

BY MARGARET E. MAHONEY

ED343962

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it

[ ] Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

M. Russell
Commonwealth Fund

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Reprinted from the 1983 Annual Report of
The Commonwealth Fund
Harkness House • One East 75th Street
New York, New York 10021
(212) 535-0400

VD 028 078

2 BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Copyright © 1981 Arnold Newman

A mentor represents to a young person
a commitment to values and modes of behavior
that engender a strong sense of personal worth
and encourage self-realization.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

MENTORS

On a Christmas Eve years ago, the novelist Thomas Wolfe wrote a note to his editor, Maxwell Perkins of Charles Scribner's Sons. Perkins had spent long hours working with Wolfe on the manuscript of *Look Homeward, Angel*. In the evenings they walked together, talking about what Wolfe wanted to write next. Now, the young novelist wrote: "You have done what I ceased to believe one person could do for another—you have created liberty and hope for me. Young men sometimes believe in the existence of heroic figures stronger and wiser than themselves, to whom they can turn for an answer to all their vexation and grief . . . . You are for me such a figure: You are one of the rocks to which life is anchored."

Wolfe describes the role of the mentor, which Perkins willingly assumed and would patiently fulfill over many years. This relationship between an experienced and dedicated adult and an inexperienced, unfocused and evolving youth meets a basic human need in the young for thoughtful, loving guidance and inspiration.

Stories abound from eminent persons of the mentors in their lives. Thomas Wolfe himself was blessed with more than one. There was also Margaret Roberts, his high school English teacher, and her "abiding love for the brightness of spirit in a boy or girl," and Horace Williams, the philosopher at Chapel Hill who taught Wolfe "to make his life prevail." When Thomas Alva Edison was a young inventor, Western Union executive Marshall Lefferts nurtured Edison's strengths, brought him into the company, and later set him up in his first laboratory. The

lyricist Stephen Sondheim was a teenager when his neighbor Oscar Hammerstein recognized his talents, taught him about the relationship of words to music and after some years introduced him to Leonard Bernstein who was looking for a lyricist for the Broadway musical *West Side Story*.

When Babe Ruth was a seven-year-old in Baltimore, his parents, who ran a waterfront saloon and had little time for their son, placed him in St. Mary's Industrial School. Much later, Babe Ruth wrote, "It was at St. Mary's that I met and learned to love the greatest man I have ever known. His name was Brother Matthias." Baseball's gain—and society's—was that Brother Matthias' special interest in Ruth gave him the encouragement he needed to play baseball and eventually to leave St. Mary's to play professionally.

We also find that mentoring has long been considered a responsibility of older members throughout the professions. In business, law, and medicine, senior people guide young people to take risks, to work with a team, to meet challenges with confidence, and to learn how someone more experienced thinks through a problem. Recently, in California's public school system teachers chosen by their fellow teachers have been acting as mentors for beginning instructors. And women are now consciously reaching out to have the mentor relationship specially designed for them. A recent survey of some 400 professional women from business, law, education, health and government showed that three-fourths found mentors important to their growth and development.

The Meaning of Mentor

The word "mentor" has a Greek root meaning steadfast and enduring. In *The Odyssey*, Homer gives the name Mentor to the friend whom Odysseus entrusted with the guidance and education of his son, Telemachus. Homer has Athena—the goddess who in Homeric belief inspired men to fortunate adventures—disguise herself as Mentor to accompany Telemachus on his voyages. In retelling the story of Telemachus, the 17th-century writer Fénelon makes Mentor the main character; ever since, "mentor" has been synonymous in Western thought with the wise teacher and guide, philosopher and friend.

Several recent studies verify that achievers are influenced by specific people in their lives far more than underachievers, that whether or not young persons succeed depends in great part on individuals who help them establish values and who inspire effort.

But so many young Americans today do not have the natural proximity to caring, mature adults or the drive to seek them out. The life experiences of these children are too narrow for them to acknowledge their basic need for constructive guidance. And many, living in scarred, deprived neighborhoods, confront too many negative influences, too many bad models.

The strong, capable and ambitious leave the inner city. The next generation remains behind — without mentors.

Basic and dramatic changes in our urban society explain the paucity of mentors for these young people. The breakup of the extended family often removes access to achieving and caring persons who, in the past, would have served as mentors. The churches and schools — once important influences on young people — have less impact. And the social composition of many neighborhoods has changed. As professional opportunities and the mainstream middle class have opened up for minorities, the strong, capable and ambitious among them leave the inner city, the old neighborhood. The next generation remains behind — without mentors.

In these neighborhoods, there has been a sharp rise in the number of one-parent families; and often the single parent is a woman living in poverty. Such mothers, if they can find work, may have little time to devote to their children; and if the mothers are very young, whether working or not, they lack experience to guide their children's development. Consider the loss to society when eight out of ten mothers under 18 years of age never complete high school. Not only are they unlikely to find productive employment, but often the destiny of their children is to be undereducated, unemployed, and welfare-

dependent. (Almost half of the school-aged children in New York City live in welfare families.) What real chance do most of these children have to break out of their environment? These youngsters lack and need the direct intervention in their lives of mature individuals who provide the one-to-one relationship that can reassure each child of his innate worth, instill values, guide curiosity, and encourage a purposeful life. In simple terms, mentoring is a relationship that can reduce alienation in children who now have little reason to fight it off.

Left behind in these neighborhoods, young people have few opportunities to practice good habits, to develop constructive human contacts, to work effectively with others. Without such opportunities, many will experience life-long economic deprivation and deep psychosocial maladjustments. Without support, young men and women—with the potential to climb up and out—fall back into a street culture that promises only hopelessness.

In the past, natural bridges to provide mentoring support existed within communities and extended families; achievers were brought together with would-be achievers. But in our "tumbleweed society"—to use Pug Henry's descriptive words from *The Winds of War*—many youngsters lack that accessibility to older people who are achievers. It is necessary to find ways to construct linkages that will make such adults available to younger people who will respond to such a relationship—across neighborhoods and between communities.

The One-to-One Relationship

Is there any greater challenge for the individual adult in America today than to devote a small but significant part of his or her life to helping another individual—that is, to serving as a mentor? Long ago, Jane Addams recognized this need to create that "instrument of companionship to open new and interesting vistas of life, to pull a young person into the stream of kindly human fellowship and a life involving normal human relations."

In our large, unwieldy society, we often lose sight of the universal need for those one-to-one relationships that reinforce hope and offer

guidance. Our massive social programs address human issues in the aggregate, and individuals melt into ciphers. Meanwhile, the majority of the citizens are—or choose to be—lulled into believing that all needs are being met. But welfare programs are not administered—nor designed—to reach the soul of the promising but neglected youngster who sees no way out of poverty, nor the confused pregnant teenager who fears that education and a career are closed off forever. As the numbers of young people needing help increase, social services, schools, and churches find it less and less possible to address their individual needs.

To reach the soul of the promising but neglected youngster who sees no way out of poverty.

Unless we stem the present swelling tide of those needs, we will not forestall a hopeless and alienated future for many of today's children; and the entire society will face insurmountable burdens as a result. This tide must be stemmed, and I believe that it can in part be done, by enlisting individuals to serve voluntarily as mentors to youngsters who, with consistent support, will make it—through school, into a job, and into self-reliance.

Only when the public press shocks us with reports that there are one million teenage pregnancies each year, are we forced to see that we are building intergenerational unemployment and poverty and seed beds for apathy and despair that crush any desire for achievement.

Over the past two summers, with the help of The Commonwealth Fund, several hundred young New Yorkers were chosen from among high school juniors who had little hope of finding a summer job but had shown an interest in working and finishing school. For six weeks, these youngsters enrolled in a new program—sponsored by Hunter College and the New York Coalition of 100 Black Women—that combines a supervised summer job with a mentor who takes

responsibility for guiding the youngster through the period of work and encouraging a future course of education that will help her—or him—to reach new individual goals.

The summer program helps these youngsters acquire confidence, develop self-discipline, and expand their horizons. The summer program also recognizes a larger issue: As society stresses self-expression, personal freedom, and personal property, it neglects to project the importance of moral principles and the individual's responsibility in the community.

Teenagers who receive some mature support are more likely to finish high school, to hold a job.

Another recognition of the importance of the individual's action lies in present efforts, funded by several foundations in various parts of the country, to help pregnant teenagers and young single mothers complete their education and prepare to join the working life of the society. The goal of these efforts is to make such young people more self-sufficient, more assured of their own capabilities. They are being paired with supportive adult women, some of whom can be described as mentors.

Statistics indicate that teenagers who receive some mature human support, in contrast to those who do not, are more likely to finish high school, more likely to hold a job and less likely to repeat their pregnancies. A study of black teenage mothers who had not finished high school when they had their first child showed that five years later a good percentage had not become pregnant a second time, had returned to school, and had obtained and held onto a job. The presence of a constant, caring person was perceived to be the key to the stabilization in the lives of these young women.

What Mentoring Is—and Is Not

Mentoring is not a panacea for all our societal ills. It is a human relationship that encourages and guides personal growth and development in an individual. It is not an alternative to social welfare programs. Nor is it a substitute for role modeling, which is straightforward imitation of someone who is admired. But role models are not necessarily good.

The point is made vividly clear in that exceptional volume entitled *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Malcolm X tells about his Mason (Michigan) Junior High School English teacher who took a special interest in him. But when Malcolm X said he wanted to be a lawyer, he was told that "niggers" could not expect to become lawyers. So Malcolm X took another route. He moved to Boston, and he writes: "I spent my first month in town with my mouth hanging open. The sharp-dressed young 'cats' who hung on the corners and in the poolrooms, bars and restaurants, and who obviously didn't work anywhere, completely entranced me." He found a negative role model named Shorty, who taught him about hustlers and hustling and how to play the numbers and introduced him to pimps and prostitutes, drugs and crime. Though his later life proved it is possible to overcome the destructive effect of a bad role model, in the absence of a caring, and positive, mentor Malcolm lacked the person in his life to help him realize his earlier ambitions.

The role model does not say "be yourself" but says "be me." The mentor represents a commitment to values and modes of behavior that engender a strong sense of personal worth and encourage self-realization.

The people who are mentors seem to relate naturally to others; they project something akin to love in their willingness to commit themselves to another human being. At the same time, there is a certain

reserve in the relationship. The ideal mentor is a social being with maturity, self-confident, resourceful, able to articulate values, a kindly person who genuinely respects others. Certainly these characteristics are not restricted to mentors; but these traits, as a whole, are necessary for mentoring. Mentors prod and provoke. They set limits. Within boundaries they help the young person stretch "to be."

A STRATEGY FOR MENTORING

The absence of traditional family and community linkages to bring younger people together with older ones means that our society must find a new strategy to create these linkages. What is called for is a renaissance of mentoring.

It is possible, indeed desirable, to build on existing structures. There are traditional organizations in this country that have long-term commitments to the concept of providing one-to-one assistance to young people: Big Brothers, Big Sisters, the Boys' Clubs, the Girls' Clubs, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, the Junior Leagues, and, of course, religious groups. Some newer structures that bring together experienced individuals with young people are the National Association of Barristers' Spouses and the Coalition of 100 Black Women. Not too long ago a call was issued by William Haskins of the National Urban League for the leadership of the black community to take initiatives to "inspire young blacks to seek a better life." He asked that those who have moved on to relative prosperity return to the inner city and volunteer to work there with young people. To answer that call will require structures under which the programs can be placed, designed and operated. It is possible that traditional organizations can answer this call but new ones may be needed as well. The new organizations could even consider linking themselves to existing institutions that have strong management capability. Whatever the sponsoring organizations, they must project a set of goals that will attract potential mentors.

Mentors: Selecting, Developing, and Maintaining

To put in place the one-to-one mentoring relationship poses three challenges: to locate appropriate mentors, to develop their skills to be effective, and to match them with youngsters needing mentors.

The first step is to identify people who have the interest, the time and the experience to make good mentors — people whose desire to help can be kindled. Willing people are there; they have to be recruited. They include persons who are active and able, and elderly people who have been edged out of their traditional mentoring role. They include people from successful economic strata. They include working people who have stayed in deprived neighborhoods and raised and educated children against all odds. They include aspiring younger people who themselves are starting out in their careers.

What appeals to people when asked to give of their time to benefit others? It may be a sense of service or a sense of community or an answer to a common complaint about the empty abstractions of life. What is surely true is that there is an underutilized resource in this country that needs to be mobilized for the common good.

Willing people are there; they have to be recruited.

Secondly, those individuals who will be successful mentors need to learn a whole set of skills to enhance their natural instincts. We are just beginning to understand how successful parents and teachers manage to instill limits, discretion, discipline and perseverance. How to instruct the mentor in teaching these values is not well delineated, but we already know that some successful techniques are to provide examples, develop the art of listening, practice patience.

Mentors must be trained and prepared to meet a variety of needs. They must expose youngsters to everyday systems, from subways to word

processors; they must, essentially, teach youngsters how one gets from A to Z. They must help strengthen familial ties, since no mentor can take over the family's role. And mentors must know how to link up to services where breakdowns have prevented access; they must know how to get help, whether it be spiritual, medical, or educational.

The mentor's relationship to the other person will often have elements of intensity. In working with adolescents the intensity is there by the very process of the teenager's growth, a process that gives teenagers a need for interaction with adults from outside the home. The teenager is distancing himself from his parents, negotiating relationships with new adults in his life and testing his ability to do so.

To create a corps of effective mentors, techniques have to be developed to help mentors handle the strains that are inevitable as they try to launch adolescents into this demanding, competitive and sometimes dangerous world. We should look for organizations that have developed techniques—and there are some—to learn what seems to work. How do they help the mentor distinguish between irrational demands and legitimate needs? Schools of social work, perhaps in concert with business schools, may also be helpful in developing management tools for recruiting, motivating, training, and retaining large numbers of mentors.

The third challenge is to match mentors with youngsters. To do this successfully, both parties must have realistic expectations. How much time can mentors who are working full time give? What are the nature and limits of the relationship that have to be developed to make it work? Paul Tillich said that any deep relationship requires watchfulness and nourishment. These seem essential for the successful mentor relationship and suggest that mentors should be prepared for a long-term relationship. The constancy of the relationship is crucial to its effectiveness. For the young person it is reassurance of the continuing competent presence of someone outside the home. For the mentor it permits time to have an effect.

A mentoring relationship is a matter of human chemistry. This chemistry distinguishes the mentor from the traditional volunteer. In establishing a relationship it is essential to take into account the difference between individuals—the chemistry that exists between the mentor and the young person with whom the mentor will work.

A Call for Leadership

The responsibility for creating a mentor system logically falls to leadership in the community where the young people live. It will be found in those organizations, agencies and institutions that have a window on the neighborhoods, the families and the youngsters. The schools, churches, social service agencies and voluntary groups can take the responsibility but cannot perform the one-to-one nurturing on the scale required. This they cannot do without recruiting a new corps of mentors, unsalaried but skilled and dedicated, and recognized for their special abilities and contributions to enhance the lives of youngsters. If such a sponsoring agency is not available in the community, then one will have to be created. Or an arm will have to reach out to an existing structure outside the community to obtain the base from which a mentoring program can be developed.

A mentoring relationship is a matter of human chemistry that takes into account the difference between individuals.

It has been wisely said that in our massive society we need socially sanctioned ways to help each other. Community leadership and social service agencies will have to legitimize the mentors' functions and help them succeed in a demanding role. To achieve this, the leadership in these organizations must believe deeply in the importance of developing individual potential and ignite their staffs' interest in new partnerships with volunteers as mentors.

The legitimization of the mentor function has to come from both national and local leadership. In a society that judges effectiveness by "value-added," the mentor's role must be perceived as having tangible worth. We have to make mentoring desirable behavior across the land. Society must reward the person who accepts this role. Usually, the rewards in our society go to those who maintain the status quo. Mentors will change how we do things, and organizations' reward systems will have to change to make the system work. They will have to supply open praise, defined levels of responsibility, and pathways to progress for the mentors. But the most important emphasis should be on a well-planned program, on easing the participation of volunteers, on providing opportunities for the mentors to expand their own development by sharing the frustrations of keeping a relationship with a teenager in balance, and by sharing their successes in working with a teenager—the rewards of such a relationship.

Young people awakened by an effective mentor are much more likely to realize their potential.

Young people awakened by an effective mentor are much more likely to realize their potential. We must risk the changes that will come about when this potential is released and find ways to recognize and use it. We will have to apply a sense of invention to this problem.

If the practical benefits in encouraging the mentoring role are realized, there will be measurable gains for society. For social service agencies, there could be a marked reduction in the caseloads of hopelessness and despair; for the schools, a marked increase in motivated students. For adults who serve as mentors, there could be a new meaning in their own lives and a new sense of leadership. For the young person who is

joined to a mentor, there could be a new horizon that combines realism with new hope. And for the society as a whole, there is the promise of learning how to minimize alienation and maximize human potential.

Some critics will be reluctant to accept anecdotal evidence as proof that mentors matter in the positive development of young people. But studies of humankind convince me that society is better off when its members take some responsibility for developing individuals in the next generation. I have what has been described as "irrepressible faith in human possibilities." I firmly believe that as citizens of a nation whose Constitution states an obligation "to promote the general welfare," we must act individually to fulfill this obligation.

Margaret E. Mahoney
President

THE
COMMONWEALTH
FUND

HARKNESS HOUSE ONE EAST 75TH STREET
NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10021
(212) 535-0400

THE COMMONWEALTH FUND

The Commonwealth Fund is a philanthropic foundation established in 1918 by Anna M. Harkness with the broad charge to enhance the common good. To carry out this mandate, in the 1980s the Fund has looked for new opportunities to improve Americans' health and well-being and to assist specific groups of Americans who have serious and neglected problems.

The Fund's five major programs aim to improve health care services, to advance the well-being of elderly people, particularly those living alone, to develop the capacities of high school students, to promote healthier lifestyles, and to improve the health of minorities. Since 1925, the Fund has also awarded Harkness Fellowships to enable young citizens of the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand to study and travel in the United States.

3/90 5M